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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000828

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SUBJECT: EU'S LACKLUSTER PROGRESS ON BIOTECH NOT WORRISOME
FOR LITHUANIA

REF: SECSTATE 153542

Classified By: CDA DLeader for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Begin summary. In separate meetings on November 13 and 14 we met with Environment, Foreign Affairs, and Agriculture Ministry officials to deliver reftel demarche. Our GOL interlocutors support the introduction of biotech in some cases. However, they all cited negative public opinion as preventing the launch of biotech in Lithuania. In addition, all felt that any sanctions that might result from EU reluctance to introduce biotech crops would not directly impact Lithuania. End summary.

Attitudes Toward Biotech

¶2. (C) Darius Lygis, the head of the Genetically Modified Organisms Division within the Ministry of Environment, claimed that from a scientific standpoint there is support for the introduction of biotech in Lithuania, and cited Lithuania's pharmaceutical biotech companies, Sicor and Fermentas, as proof of Lithuanian prowess and interest in the biotech domain. However, Lygis said it is politically impossible to introduce biotech crops in Lithuania. He laid the blame for the situation on Lithuanian Greens, who are not numerous but effectively use the media to create public support for their arguments. (Note: We are highly skeptical about Lygis's assessment of the Greens' effectiveness. They have no political party, no elected officials, and claim a membership of "some 500 members" throughout Lithuania.)

¶3. (C) Albinas Zananavicius, Director of the MFA's Foreign Trade Policy Office (Assistant Secretary-equivalent), said that the MFA's position is that the GOL always has and should respect WTO rules. However, he acknowledged that the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Environment make decisions regarding biotech without input from his office. Zananavicius was unfamiliar with the recent announcement by French President Sarkozy and the Italian proposal calling for a moratorium on biotech product authorizations (reftel).

¶4. (C) Laimonas Ciakas, Director of the Ministry of Agriculture's EU Affairs and International Relations Department, told us that the GOL position is still very cautious regarding biotech. Ciakas reiterated points he has made in previous meetings with us regarding biotech: the GOL wants to see data on the predicted effects of multiple generations consuming these products, buffer zones would be difficult to establish in Lithuania's small farm environment, and the citizens of Lithuania are against such products. He emphasized, though, that products that contain biotech are

already in Lithuanian markets and if the EU ruled a product was approved Lithuania would have to comply.

What if there are retaliatory actions?

15. (C) Lygis said the GOL is aware retaliatory actions are possible if the EU does not permit the marketing and planting of biotech crops. He agreed this would be a negative development. Lygis stated that if the EU were to pass a directive permitting the planting and marketing of biotech crops, the GOL would follow it without objection. Zananavicius echoed Lygis's comment that the GOL is aware of the possibility of sanctions. However, he added as an "off-the-record" observation, that any country such as Lithuania, where 80 percent of the population would oppose such a decision from an international body, can withstand any sanctions.

16. (C) If the EU is sanctioned due to the events described in reftel, Lygis postulated that the GOL would have no reaction. He argued that the sanctions would be at the EU level and not against the GOL. Zananavicius's comments paralleled those of Lygis, as he said that sanctions usually target countries that are sources of problems, i.e., not Lithuania. Ciakas also believed that sanctions would apply at the EU level and would be unlikely to affect Lithuania directly.

COMMENT

17. (C) We have heard the argument before that Lithuania cannot support cultivation and marketing of biotech crops

VILNIUS 00000828 002 OF 002

because of public opposition. However we find the degree to which GOL officials can dissociate their Member State from the actions of the EU (and the penalties it may face) to be truly remarkable. We will continue to remind the GOL that it has a vote in EU affairs equal to those of other Member States, and that it can influence Brussels if it chooses to.

LEADER